Central American NEWSLETTER

Newsletter of the Central American Group of the Spanish Main Society.

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EDITORIAL

This is the last issue of 1989 and as a result of the change in subscription payments to January, will probably run us into deficit. Accordingly it is most important that members pay their subscriptions for 1990 promptly. With this issue I have included last reminders to those who still have not paid their 1989 subscription and some even 1988. Regrettably because of the tight monetary situation we find ourselves in, those in arrears for 1989 will not be receiving issues for 1990.

The first meeting of the new season will be held as usual at the Victory Services Club on Saturday September 16th, at 10.30 a.m. in the El Alamein room. It will be an important meeting comprising four International displays - Professor John West "Official Postal Seals", John Fosbery "The Great Adventure of Christopher Columbus" - both of which were awarded Vermeil medals at the recent Exfina '89 exhibition in Santiago; in the afternoon we shall see Clive Akerman's "Argentine Revenues", Vermeil at Stockholm and in India, as well as my "Nicaraguan Railway Tickets" which were part of a display gaining Large Silvers in Stockholm and India, and of which a full write up of this new research appeared in the London Philatelist of March/April 1988.

I see from the Palmares report that the group was not very well represented in India. However I would like to extend our congratulations to Bill Welch for his Vermeils for the Philatelic Literature Review and the American Philatelist, and also to Derek Pocock for his silver bronze for the Railway Parcel Stamps of Western Australia.

At Philexfrance Kilian Nathan received a Large Gold for Classic Nicaragua and a Vermeil for his Seebeck display. Robert D'Elia got a Large Gold for Ecuador, and Kaarlo Anttila a Gold also for Ecuador. Large Vermeils were awarded to Leo Harris for Ecuador and Henry Madden for Guatemala. Vermeils went to Cornelis Spoelman for France, Alfred Guggisberg for Guatemala, Finn Stjernholck for Venezuela, and two to Bill Welch in the literature section. George McCarty received a Large Silver for Nicaragua, Ernest Fricks a Silver for Lagos and Cornelis Hooghuis a Silver for Maritime Mail. Congratulations to them all and also Max Guggenheim.

Mike Birks

HONDURAS: THE ONE CENTAVO SURCHARGE OF 1929

by HENRY MADDEN

This one centavo surcharged issue (Scott 279, SG 267) is one of the more interesting surcharges of Honduras, yet to my knowledge no definitive research has been published about this stamp. Neither Scott nor Gibbons have priced the varieties which should be regarded as amongst the rarer stamps of Honduras.

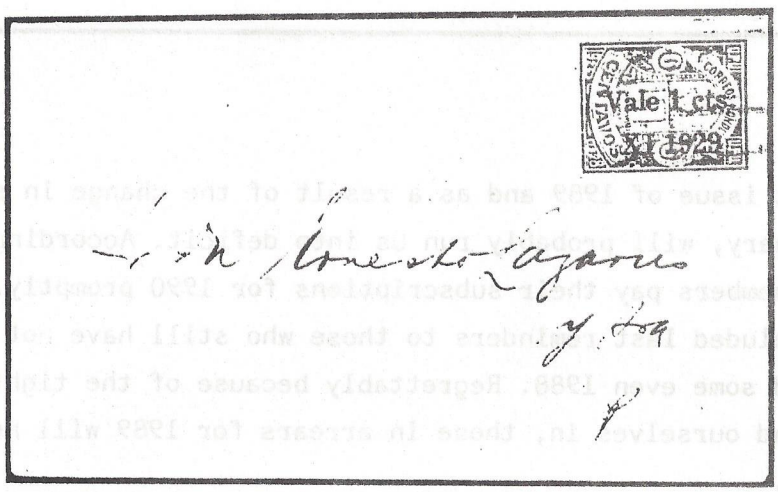


Figure 1. A local cover dated January 2, 1930 franked with the one centavo surcharge reading up (Normal). This cover illustrates the major need for the one centavo surcharge i.e. to meet the demand for New Year's cards. Latin Americans send New Year's cards in lieu of Christmas cards. Covers franked, in the proper time frame, with this issue are quite scarce. No cover has been recorded with the surcharge reading down.

The 1929 surcharge was printed on the basic six centavos rose lilac sheet of 100 stamps (10 x 10). The basic stamp was printed in 1924 and held by the treasury until the 1929 surcharging. Irving Green in his article on Honduras in 'Billig's Philatelic Handbook', volume 20, page 42, summarises the issue as follows:-

> "The government also tried to ease the shortage (of stamps) by preparing its own version of the Herrera Bust format in a 6 centavos value authorized for 10,000* stamps dated by a decree of January 22, 1924. The usual poorly printed product, in a rose lilac colour, resulted, but it's issuance sceduled for February 1, 1924 ran afoul the Revolution and failed to make it's appearance at that time. Some years later, in 1929, this local production was surcharged to a 1 centavo value (Scott 179) and used to relieve a current shortage of that denomination."

*The 10,000 stamps figure is obviously a typographical error and should read 100,000 stamps.

NOTE: As a point of interest this is the first locally produced stamp on water-marked paper.

In the Irving Green collection were copies of two letters written by Raul Duron Membreno (Scott's agent in Honduras) to John W Luff (Scott's editor) that shed a great deal of light on the surcharging and preparation of this issue. They read as follows:-

"Tegucigalpa
December 12, 1928

Dear Mr Luff:
The much expected lct/6cts stamp has been issued, 100,000 of them. As there was not enough type available for the (full) setting, (the plate) consisted of 50 individuals to make a plate to be printed twice on the (basic) sheet of 100. This was done at the beginning on every sheet with the result that half of the sheet was surcharged upside down with regard to the other half. After a few sheets had been thus surcharged, it was decided to print the rest only on one half and after it had been finished on the 1000 sheets, the setting was moved or accomodated so that the other half was (also) surcharged upright (reading up). Do I explain this clear enough for you? Two errors of date were in the setting which were corrected after they were discovered, when some twenty sheets had been printed. I enclose them for examination. Also you will find tête-bêche surcharges in the first sheets printed. Also enclosed for examination.

In these new surcharges of stamps would be, a) surcharge reading up, b) surcharge reading down, c) error 9192, d) error 1992, e) double surcharge one inverted, f) error 1992 in tête-bêche pair with normal surcharge.

The right total number of these surcharged stamps is 102,600. After examining a great number of these stamps, I conclude that the normal is the surcharge reading up.

(signed) Raul Duron Membreno"

Then again on December 23, 1929 Duron again writes to Luff.

"I must rectify again some information I gave you in my letter dated December 12, 1929. 6 more sheets of the lc/6cts with the surcharge tete-beche, that is, half of the sheet printed upwards and half of the sheet printed downwards. No (more) double surcharges or errors. My first information regarding these holds good.

(signed) Raul Duron Membreno"

The two Duron Letters to Luff are obviously the result of an on-site inspection and count by Duron of the surcharge before issuance by the Honduran authorities. In reviewing the letters the following facts become apparent:

1. The surcharge was printed by using a single setting of fifty subjects (5 x 10) applied twice to the 1924 basic sheet of stamps (10 x 10).
2. 102,600 stamps (1026 sheets) were surcharged.
3. The first 26 sheets were printed with the 50 subject settings tete-beche to each other. Therefore, vertical tête-bêche pairs and blocks will exist.

4. The errors in the date 9192 and 1992 were corrected during the printing of the first 20 sheets.
5. The error double surcharge, one surcharge reading up and one reading down is known in the tête-bêche settings.
6. The error in the date can be assumed to exist in vertical tête-bêche pairs or blocks.

The error in the date of 9192 and 1992 seem to appear equally in stamps observed. Out of a total of eleven stamps, six were 9192 and five were 1992. Strangely only two of the eleven stamps had the surcharge reading up. I also saw three large blocks of the tête-bêche sheets with the errors corrected. It could be assumed that the last six sheets of the tête-bêche reported by Duron were already corrected.

With the surcharge reading up, 1992 occurs in position 10 in the setting and 9192 in position 50. The double surcharges always have one surcharge reading up and one surcharge reading down. The doubling was caused by the top row of the bottom surcharge setting overlapping the bottom row of the top surcharge setting resulting in one row of double surcharges per sheet. The top surcharge setting always reads down and the bottom setting up. Two sheets are thought to be printed with a double surcharge row as a tête-bêche block of four and a vertical pair are found with the error of date 1992 in the double surcharge.

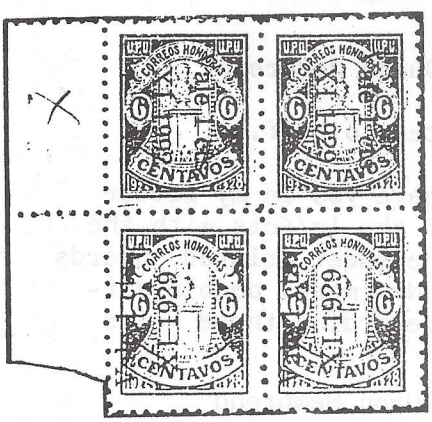


Fig 2

Fig 3

Figure 2 A tête-bêche block of four with the top surcharge reading down and the bottom surcharge reading up. The error in the date of 1992 being position 1 of the block

Figure 3 A block of four with the surcharge reading up. The error in the date of 9192 being position 4 in the block.

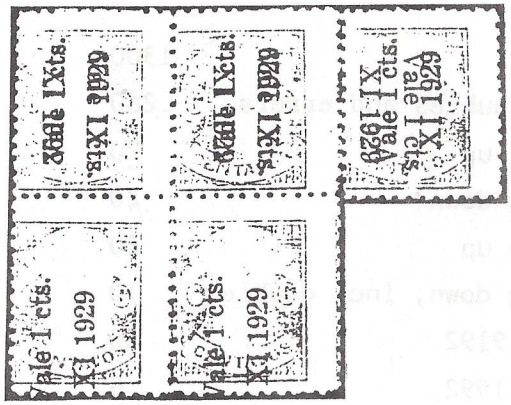
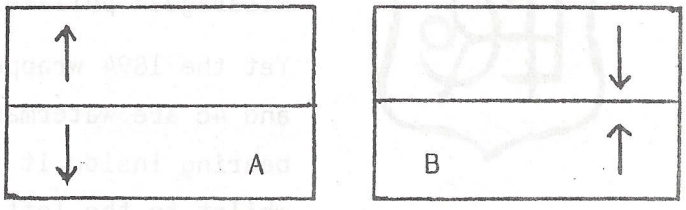


Figure 4 (left).
A tête-bêche block of five with the top row of three stamps doubly surcharged. The error in the date of 1992 with the surcharge reading down, is found in position 1 of the block.

7. After corrections in the setting and new printing proceedure, 1,000 sheets were printed with the surcharge reading up and no errors.

Duron's letter of December 12, 1929 implies that the surcharged issue was already on sale in the Post Office of that date. All sheets of the surcharge observed have a single handstamp control on the reverse reading "TRIBUNAL SUPERIOR DE CUENTAS, HONDURAS, C.A." dated "DIC. 11, 1929". In any event, it would be safe to assume the issue was available in Tegucigalpa by December 15th and in other post offices in plenty of time to meet the heavy demand for one centavo stamps for the traditional New Year's cards.

Further investigation into this issue based upon examination of well over 1,000 stamps in sheets, large blocks and strips revealed many interesting discoveries occuring in the tête-bêche sheets. Duron mentioned that "half a sheet was surcharged upside down with regards to the other half". This is quite true but there are two variations to this printing namely, sheets with top half reading up and bottom half reading down and sheets with top half reading down and bottom half reading up.



Of the forty-five vertical tête-bêche pairs examined, as thirty-four pieces, twelve were of type A and twenty-two of type B, which would indicate that the twenty-six sheets were pretty closely divided between the two setting arrangements.

Recapitulation of the Issue's Varieties

a. Surcharge reading down	1300
b. Tete-beche vertical pairs including doubles and errors	260
c. Error in date 9129, surcharge reading up	20
d. Error in date 9129, surcharge reading down	20
e. Error in date 1992, surcharge reading up	20
f. Error in date 1992, surcharge reading down, inc. doubles	10
g. Tête-bêche vertical pairs with error 9192	10
h. Tête-bêche vertical pairs with error 1992	8
i. Double surcharge	18
j. Double surcharge with error 1992 and tête-bêche	2

The above table is an estimate of the number of varieties printed and is in no way and inventory of stamps observed. Over time, many of the vertical pairs will have been separated and errors destroyed.

In closing, why was the abbreviation "cts." used instead of "cto."?

NICARAGUA: A PREVIOUSLY UNRECOGNISED WATERMARK? by DEREK POCOCK

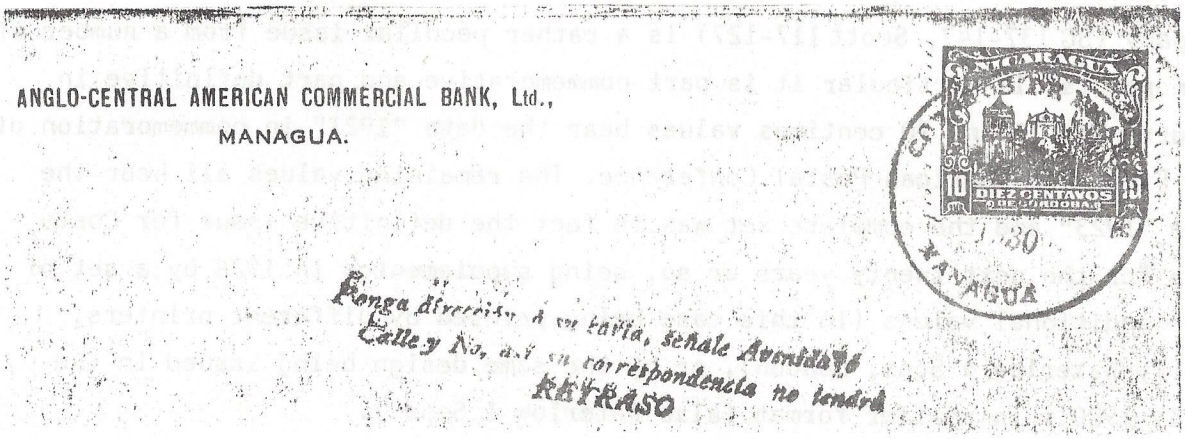
No watermark is recorded for any Nicaraguan postal stationery in Higgins & Gage, nor have I been able to find a mention of any in the Stroub papers, Seebeck - Hero or Villain?, or in the other fairly minimal literature on Nicaraguan philately.

Yet the 1894 wrappers namely 1c,2c and 4c are watermarked with a shield bearing inside it the motif ERCo, whilst to the left is "No 1" and above, the word standard in outlined lower case letters. The watermark exists both vertical and sideways and is staggered such that parts of three watermarks can appear on one wrapper being 160mm apart both horizontally and vertically.

The paper appears porous and glazed. As we all know used copies of any Nicaraguan wrapper are very scarce but I believe that the watermark is on the genuine item and probably constant to the whole issue. Does it occur on the wrappers of any other year, and who were/are ERCo?

NICARAGUA: ANOTHER UNUSUAL CACHET

Following the unusual cachet in our last issue, sent in by Denis Kilner (more of that later), Kilian Nathan sends us another which he considers much rarer.



It reads "Ponga dirección a su carta, señale Avenida o Calle y No, asi su correspondencia no tendrà RETRASO", which means "Put the address of your house and the street number on your correspondence, or it will be liable to delay", which clearly the Bank has not done.

Kilian sends another photostat of a cover with the same mark Denis Kilner sent. This cover is remarkable for its stamp, which is a double overprint.

P J Cupper writes regarding the illegible part of Denis' cachet. He writes "The word is in fact 'sírvase' which in conjunction with the infinitive 'informar'is an official style formally saying "please inform"'. Kilian adds that the probable reasons for this cachet were the searching of covers for cash or cheques and the opening of mail for political reasons. Most of the former would have been sent CERTIFICADO which would pick them out as targets.

COSTA RICA: THE 2 CENTIMOS DEFINITIVE STAMP OF 1923

by RICHARD H SAUNDRY

The Costa Rican definitive issue of 1923, printed by the American Bank Note Company (SG 137-147, Scott 117-127) is a rather peculiar issue from a number of standpoints. In particular it is part commemorative and part definitive in nature. The 10 and 20 centimos values bear the date "1921" in commemoration of the First Pan-American Postal Conference. The remaining values all bear the date "1923" and the complete set was in fact the definitive issue for Costa Rica for the next twenty years or so, being supplemented in 1926 by a set of four additional values (in this case being printed by different printers, namely Waterlow & Sons, London), or by the same design being issued in the early 1930's in smaller format (also Waterlow & Sons.).

What does not seem to have been touched upon in the philatelic literature is where the designs for the original set of 1923 printed by the ABNCo were derived. Clearly the designs for the Columbus-related issues (the 10, 12 and 20 centimos values) were concocted from stock items at the American printers and elements of the same design are to be found in the pictorial issues provided by the printers for other countries, in particular the Columbus commemoratives of 1892 for the USA and for Argentina. Nevertheless some of the values, the 1c (National Monument), the 4c (Banana plant), the 5c (General Post Office, San Jose), the 40c (Map of Costa Rica) and the 1 Colon (Portrait of Manuel M Gutierrez) must have been designed using pictures provided by the Costa Rican Post Office.

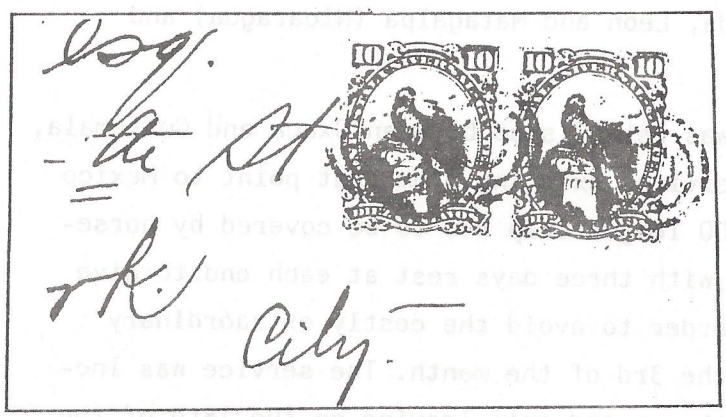
This leads me to the point of this article: the last value of the original set of stamps was the 2 centimos value issued in "chrome yellow" (SG 138, Scott 118) described in the catalogues as either showing "Coffee Plantation" (Saenz), "Coffee Growing" (Gibbons) or "Harvesting Coffee" (Scott). As far as I am aware no-one has mentioned if this is a design based on some real Costa Rican view or if it is just a figment of the designer's imagination

It was quite exciting for me to find that nestling within my collection was a Costa Rican picture postcard sent from San Jose on 18 June 1924. The picture was exactly the same as the design used for the 2 centimos stamp. It was a colour photograph desribed as "Picking Coffee, Tres Rios, C.R." and for those who may not have found the reproduction on the stamp too clear it is of a rather pretty young native lady in a white dress and wearing a straw hat, holding a basket of coffee beans.

The card was printed by (or was the picture photographed by?) Fotografia M Gómez Miralles (the only printing on the address side of the card). What this card does is to locate the picture used for the stamp to Tres Rios in Costa Rica. Probably both the picture postcard and the stamp design were derived from a third photographic source of the 1922/23 period. Is there anybody who may have more information on this subject? Is there by any chance anyone who has a Costa Rican picture postcard showing the same view/photograph as used on some other Costa Rican related subject depicted on a different value of the same set of stamps?

(The same original was used for the National Palace definitive of Nicaragua, as was used for the picture postcard illustrated in Issue 21, page 9.-Ed)

GUATEMALA: Bogus, faked and dubious cancellations on 19th century stamps.



In response to Mark Spycher's article on this subject in our last issue, Anthony Marks sends us more examples of these dubious cancellations. He writes "Note that the handwriting on mine is strikingly similar to that illustrated on page 166". He is unable to identify the source of these cancellations since they originated through auction, but clearly there is a need to exercise care with this issue, since there must be more similar items which could turn up anywhere.

REYNO DE GUATEMALA: COLONIAL MAIL ROUTES by CÉCILE GRUSON

Until its independence from Spain in 1821, all of Central America, from the now Mexican province of Chiapas to Costa Rica included, was part of Reyno de Guatemala, hereafter referred to as Guatemala. The organisation of mails in that region was not an easy matter on account of the mountainous character of the land. The routes are illustrated on the map on page 182.

During the XVIth century, mails were sent according to the needs of the Spanish Administration and publicy announced several days in advance, so that private persons might also entrust their correspondence to the official couriers. The couriers were forbidden to carry mail on their own account, but could accept letters outisde the mailbag at places where there was no post office.

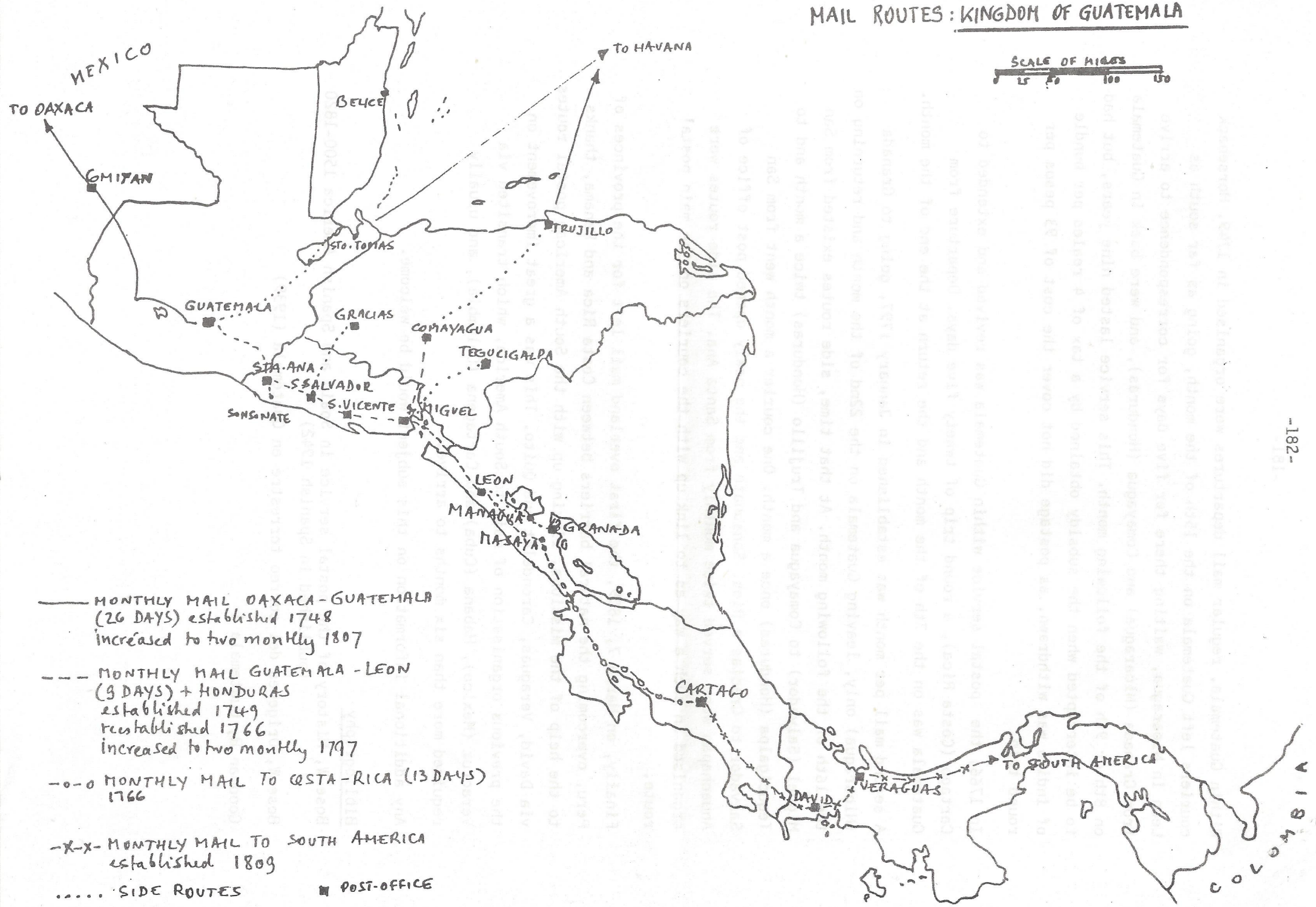
In Peru first, then towards the end of the XVIth century in Mexico and early XVIIth century in Guatemala, the colonies were provided with a regular mail administration. As was the custom in most European countries at the time, the Spanish crown auctioned the mail concession to the highest bidder by creating the office of "Correo Mayor".

Guatemala started with this system in 1702 when Manuel de Estévez was named provisional "Correo Mayor": he only held the position for one year as he died in 1603. In 1612, the Audencia of Guatemala named Balthasar Pinto de Amberes to this post. In 1620, the King of Spain formally established the office of Correo Mayor for Guatemala and the first auction was on December 22, 1620. There were four Correo Mayores between 1620 and 1768, when the postal services were taken over directly by the Spanish crown.

Around 1620. postal routes went to Chiapas, San Salvador and the South Coast. Pinto de Amberes had assistants in Ciudad Real (Chiapas), Comayagua (Honduras), San Salvador (El Salvador), Granada, Leon and Matagalpa (Nicaragua) and Cartego (Costa Rica).

In 1748 a monthly mail departure was established between Oxaca and Guatemala, to link up with the weekly mail services existing from that point to Mexico and Veracruz. The approximately 500 league trip was to be covered by horse-back couriers in twenty six days, with three days rest at each end to give enough time to reply to mail, in order to avoid the costly extraordinary mails. This monthly mail left on the 3rd of the month. The service was increased to twice monthly in 1807, the second mail leaving on the 18th of the month.

MAIL ROUTES: KINGDOM OF GUATEMALA



Within Guatemala, regular mail departures were organised in 1749. Horseback couriers left Guatemala on the 15th of the month, going as far south as Leon in Nicaragua, waiting there for five days for correspondence to arrive from Granada (Nicaragua) and Comayagua (Honduras), and were back in Guatemala on 8th or 9th of the following month. This service lasted nine years, but had to be interrupted when the subsidy obtained by a tax of 4 reales per bundle of indigo was withdrawn, as postage did not cover the cost of 93 pesos per round trip.

In 1766, the postal service within Guatemala was revived and extended to Cartago (Costa Rica), a round trip of twnety five days. Departure from Guatemala was on the 7th of the month and the return at the end of the month.

A second mail per month was established in January 1797, going to Granada (Nicaragua) only, leaving Guatemala on the 22nd of the month and returning on the 16th of the following month. At that time, side routes existed from San Miguel (Salvador) to Comayagua and Trujillo (Honduras) twice a month and to Tegucigalpa (Honduras) once a month. One courier a month went from San Salvador to Gracias a Dios. Sonsonate and the newly opened post office of Ahuachapan were served twice monthly from Santa Ana. The side routes were organised in such a way as to link up with the couriers on the main postal route.

Finally, on March 7, 1809, the first overland mail left for the provinces of Peru, overcoming the natural barriers between Costa Rica and Panama, thanks to the help of the missions, linking up with the South American postal routes via David, Veraguas, Carondelet and Quito. This was a great improvement on the previous organisation of mail to South America, which transited via Veracruz (Mexico), Habana (Cuba) and Cartagena (Colombia), and usually required more than six months to arrive.

Any additional information on this subject would be welcome.

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